



GÖTEBORG STUDIES IN POLITICS 5

Olof Petersson

Change in Swedish Political Behavior

C W K GLEERUP

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Preface

The present dissertation is based on the following articles which will be indicated by the appropriate Roman numerals:

- I Olof Petersson:
"Röstning i ett kårval"
Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift No. 4 1973
- II Olof Petersson:
"Political Orientations and Participation in Demonstrations among Swedish Students"
European Journal of Political Research, Vol 1, No. 4 1973
- III Olof Petersson:
"Change and Unreliability"
Quality and Quantity, Vol. 8, No. 3 1974
- IV Olof Petersson—Bo Särllvik:
"Valet 1973"
Allmänna valen 1973. Del 3. (SOS) Statistiska centralbyrån, Stockholm 1975
- V Olof Petersson:
"Social Class and Electoral Change: Sweden 1956—1973"

During my work I have benefited from the helpful comments of my colleagues at the Departments of Political Science at the University of Göteborg and the University of Uppsala. I am particularly indebted to professor Bo Särllvik (now at the University of Essex) for his criticism and encouragement. Sincere thanks are also extended to Sören Holmberg, Göteborg.

Stability is often said to be a hallmark of Swedish party politics. The basic structure of the party system has not changed during the last fifty years. Party politics in the mid-seventies has very much the same flavor as in the 1920s. The major political groupings, the dominant ideological dimension and the relative strength of the parties have on the whole been unaffected by depression, world war and postwar prosperity, cold war and Vietnam, economic hangover and labor unrest.

The recent reshuffling of the Danish and Norwegian party systems makes Swedish politics look still more stable. But the experience of our neighbours raised the question whether the same drastic change also could occur in Sweden. Maybe the Swedish stability of today is only superficial. Are there any latent conflicts and processes which under certain conditions would become manifest and affect the basic party structure? This underlying question has led, not to automatic predictions of eternal stability, but to the search for possible sources of instability.

The five articles covered by this dissertation do not give a definite answer to our basic question. Instead they should be viewed as different approaches to the study of change and stability in Swedish politics. They have one trait in common: they are all based on survey research. There is little doubt that the computerized analysis of a "miniature population" is one of the most efficient methods of studying processes of change in the electorate. To complete the picture—or to serve as a substitute for survey data in earlier historical periods—the researcher also may utilize ecological data, time series of economic and social variables, etc. But although interview data may have the largest potential of illuminating the

mechanisms of how change takes place, several analytical problems are attached to the survey technique. Precaution must be taken so that fallacious inferences are not made. Sometimes observed change in data is not representative of real change. In this dissertation some of these inferential problems will be discussed. An underlying theme of the five articles can in fact be formulated as: methods and problems of analyzing change in survey data.

Student Politics in the Late 1960s

Even if one wants to reach conclusions about the whole electorate, studies of limited subgroups can yield valuable knowledge, substantially as well as methodologically. In the late 1960s political trends among students were expressions of new ideas emerging in society. Research on student politics might reveal sources and potentials for change in political behavior. Findings from analyses on student data cannot directly be generalized to the whole population. However, analysis on student politics has a certain advantage. Hypotheses that probably would be weakly supported in a mass sample get strong confirmation among students. This fact pertains to an often observed peculiarity when analyzing survey data: "It frequently turns out that the hypothesis is then very clearly confirmed for the most educated, with results rapidly shading off to zero within the less educated majority of the population" (Converse 1964 p 255). Or put in a somewhat different way: "Political trends and ideological winds among the whole population are magnified and find a much more fullblown expression in the political microcosm of the university" (II, p 300).

The student body is not homogeneous. Even on the prominent feature discussed above—involvement in politics—students differ from each other. Not all students were activists; in fact only a

minority participated in the union election. But just as we can analyze the student body as an aggregate, a study of intragroup change can yield interesting knowledge as to how and why people get involved in politics. It can be shown that the growth (and decline) of political involvement can be captured by a simple "socialization model" and by the notion of "student career."¹ A distinction regarding the *object* for political involvement must then be made. Involvement in *national* politics is thus analytically separated from involvement in *student* politics. The two concepts are operationalized by self-rated interest in national politics and student union politics, respectively. Since each of the two queries comprised four response alternatives, a sixteen-fold typology can be construed. In six cells the number of cases are too few to permit any analysis, but in the rest of the property-space the separate effects on national and student political involvement can be studied. Each subgroup can be described by a number of social characteristics, all of which in some way or another measure "position in the student career": age, length of study time, and type of residence (I, Tables 5 through 9). A characteristic differentiation can then be observed. The socialization pattern of national political involvement is different from the development of involvement into student politics. Interest in national political affairs is continuously growing during the student career. Interest in student politics, however, peaks in the midst of the academic career and declines towards the final stages of university life. Freshmen are thus comparatively uninterested in national as well as student politics. But socialization into the university subculture produces increased interest in both national and student politics. When the student after some time anticipates the end of his life at the university, marries, has children, and moves away from the student residence, a process of *desocialization* decreases his interest in student politics. Involvement in national politics, however, continues to grow (I, p 241 and figure 4).

This pattern of change in involvement is of prime importance when evaluating the determinants of participation in a student union

¹ The data were gathered in connection with a student union election at the University of Göteborg in April 1969. About 1,700 students were interviewed by a mail questionnaire.

election. Since participation is strongly related to interest in student politics (but not to national political interest when controlling for level of student political involvement—cf. I, table 4), one would expect a curvilinear relationship between position in the student career and voting. Such an association exists: the highest level of participation can be found in the middle categories, while both young students/freshmen and old students/students with many semesters spent at the university exhibit lower participation (I, 233–235). Furthermore, age and number of semesters have a very interesting composite effect upon turnout. When analyzing the separate effects of any of these two variables controlling for the other, it turns out that they have an opposite impact on voting. The association between number of semesters and participation is then monotonically positive, while age is negatively related to voting. Extremely low turnout is consequently found among old students with few semesters. The observed zero-order curvilinear association is produced by this interaction pattern and the intercorrelation between age and length of time spent at the university. The obvious methodological argument derived from this analysis is that by decomposing the survey sample it is possible to trace different and sometimes counter-acting determinants of change.

If “student career” can be said to be the major variable explaining variation in turnout, the basic cause of party choice in the student union election can also be captured in one general determinant: national political attitudes. National political party preference, self-placement on a left-right scale, attitude on Vietnam, etc. were all highly correlated with student party choice (I, p 243 ff). Voters’ perceptions of party orderings were also consistent with a one-dimensional model, which was easy to interpret as a left-right scale (I, p 247). The strong link between student subculture and national politics is again corroborated.

Although this description of causes of party choice is a static one, it also has an important bearing in a dynamic perspective. Change in the volatile student subpopulation cannot be interpreted without considering the basic ideological dimension in Swedish politics—the

left-right scale. The importance of the left-right dimension is also showed in the article on participation in demonstrations among students (II). Both propensity to demonstrate and actual participation is strongly determined by basic political value preference (II, Tables II and IV). That left-wing students were more prone to demonstrate than centrist or right-wing students in the late 60s is, of course, not a very astonishing result. The analysis could, however, be extended a bit further. One could, for example, ask the question whether this strong monotonic relationship between political belief and protest behavior is bound to exist also under different historical circumstances. The answer might be yes: in a radical ideology "innovative" political means might always be legitimate, while "a 'high degree of unconventional political behavior' might be 'logically' incompatible with the elements of a conservative ideology" (II, p 303). The question might also be given a negative answer: the relationship between value preference and propensity to take an active part in political demonstrations might take different forms depending on the political situation.

How could these two hypotheses be empirically tested when one survey only gives a snap-shot of relationships at one single moment? Although a strict test of hypotheses would require an elaborate diachronic research design, the single survey can still yield some hints of an answer. The substitute for panel or time series data is a "self-rated change" query. After the left-right self-placement question respondents were simply asked whether they had "another political preference today as compared with two or three years ago". Despite the obvious validity problems I would argue that the subjective measure could serve as a rough indicator of change in value preference (II, p 304). Groups on the ideological spectrum can thus be stratified according to recent change in beliefs. The general pattern in data (II, Table III) suggests that "not only leftists undergoing a change towards the left but also rightists both going towards the left *and* towards the right are more inclined to engage in unconventional political activities as compared with those having a stable value preference" (II, p 305). In view of this finding it is hard to accept the notion of a permanent monotonic relationship between

value preference and protest behavior. The militance of the left reflects the political trends of the 1960s. With a change in the political climate another part of the left-right continuum might be easier to mobilize.

Short-Term Trends in Political Party Support

The dominant role of the left-right dimension is obvious also on the mass electorate level. Attitudes on various political issues can often be summarized in one simple left-right index (Särilvik 1967, 1970a, 1970b, 1974; Holmberg 1974; Lindén 1975). Another method of assessing the plausibility of the left-right model is to analyze the "distances" between parties. The agreement between reality and the one-dimensional model can be appraised if a "distance" measure is possible to obtain. In his studies on Swedish electoral behavior Bo Särilvik has suggested several ways to operationalize interparty distances. One straightforward technique is to ask respondents which party they consider "best", "second best," etc. A modified version of this approach (which has proved to yield somewhat different results) is to ask for respondent perception as to which party is "closest" to party P, "second closest" to P, etc. (Särilvik 1974). Distance measures can also be calculated on the basis of actual transition flows from one election to another. The logic here is that changes between adjacent parties are supposed to be more frequent than transitions between parties far apart from each other (Särilvik 1968; IV p 74 ff).

The predominant substantial result of these analyses has been that the Swedish parties fit into a one-dimensional left-right model: (1) Communists, (2) Social Democrats, (3) Center Party, (4) People's Party, and (5) Moderates. In the 1973 election one can, however, observe one minor deviation from this model. Both accord-

ing to preference data (IV, Tables 23–24) and to change in electoral support (IV, Table 8) the distance between the Center Party and Moderates seems to be shorter than the distance between the People's Party and the Moderates. Although explanations for this pattern immediately could be given (the sharp decline of the People's Party in 1973 and the growth of the Center Party—cf. IV, p 74 ff), it is important to note how recent change in party support also affects one expression for the stable and simple Swedish party system: the left-right model.

Though one of the main results of the 1973 election was the defeat of the People's Party, one must bear in mind that the number of voters changing party allegiance between 1970 and 1973 was not larger than between the previous elections (IV, Table 11). There has been a certain degree of turnover between elections, but this amount of change obviously has been quite stable during the last decade. A fairly constant proportion of one fourth of the electorate in some way or another changes behavior between two elections (from one party to another or between voting and nonvoting).

Change in party support could involve more than switching from one party to another. A voter can continue to vote for his old party but may considerably change his view of and attachment to his party. Though not overtly visible such “undercurrents” in party support can later have significant impact on electoral outcome. Party loyalty is directly linked to stability since it has been shown that electoral mobility is highest among voters who in the previous election only were weakly identified with the party they voted for. The flow of switchers between two elections is thus to a large extent an exchange of voters in the “periphery” of the parties' electoral support (IV, p 73; Särilvik 1970a and 1970b; Särilvik 1975 p 130 ff).

By studying the strength of party identification within each party's electorate from one election to another it is possible to trace “undercurrents” of the kind described above. In this perspective the evaluation of the 1973 election result becomes somewhat different. Certainly the Center Party won a large number of new voters at the

1973 election, but in 1973 a general decline in party identification can be observed for the Center Party (IV, p 73–74). This is not only true for the new but also for the old Center Party voters. The opposite conclusion can be drawn for the Social Democrats. In spite of the electoral loss, the Social Democratic voters—old as well as new—were just as or even more identified with their party (IV, p 73–74). It should be noted that between 1968 and 1970 there was increased identification for the Center Party and decreased identification for the Social Democrats. In this light the Center Party success in 1973 seems less stable than in 1970. Conversely, perhaps the Social Democratic loss was not as devastating as the overall vote figure would indicate. Besides these substantial comments on an election result, our methodological point is that processes of change can be analytically elaborated by means of a series of surveys (not necessarily panel studies), provided that the researcher is able to make the relevant statistical controls and subgroup analyses.

The Social Bases of the Swedish Party System 1956–1973

During the last decades the social structure of Swedish society has changed but slowly. Among the most prominent trends are the declining farm population and the growth of the public sector. From a political perspective the most important fact is that the social composition of the parties' electoral support has on the whole been unaltered during the last twenty years. There is one major exception to this generalization: the Center Party has not only kept its old core base among farmers but has also expanded into new social groups. The proportion of farmers in the Center Party's electoral support has continuously declined. With this deviant case in mind, it is still remarkable how the social bases of the other parties have been fairly constant from one election to the next, in spite of the

fact that the total strength of a party may fluctuate upwards or downwards considerably (IV, 86 ff).

It turns out that this empirical regularity can be comprehended by a simple model of electoral change (V). The basic idea of the model can be derived from the phenomenon of "uniform election wind."

It has often been observed that a favorable or unfavorable election result for a particular party is visible in most subgroups (e.g. Särilvik 1966, 1970b). The electoral trend is shared uniformly across subgroups. The notion of "social uniformity of the electoral swing" can be operationalized in several ways. Even if one accepts that the model ought to predict that a party would increase or decrease by the same number of percentage units within all subgroups, it is not immediately clear what is the relevant percentage base. In the model chosen here it is argued that gains or losses ought to be proportional to initial strength within groups (V).

The accuracy of the model must be considered fairly good. Agreement between data and model predictions is in a large number of instances satisfying. The major deviation from the model is, as expected, the Center Party. The social expansion of the Center Party electoral support is far beyond the magnitude one would predict from the simple "uniform change" model (V).

It also turns out that increased or decreased association between class and voting (as for example estimated by one-way analysis of variance) could be an artefact. Even if the social composition of a party is constant between two elections, the degree of class voting may change simply because the absolute size of the party changes. One important use of the presented model is to isolate and control for these trivial size effects and to locate substantially significant changes in class voting.

Measuring Change with Survey Data

In the empirical examples given here different methods of evaluating change have been presented. It should be noted that nowhere have panel data been used. In fact, our exposition can be given the title “How could one measure change with survey data when panel data are not available?”. There are at least three answers to this question.

1. Series of surveys

Data from different samples drawn from the same population and collected on different occasions put the analyst in a favorable situation, provided that information gathered is comparable between surveys. It is then possible to describe an evolutionary process by a succession of static models (cf. Schumpeter 1954). Since large-scale interview studies now have been carried out for some decades a wealth of material is available for portraying social and political transitions in the electorate. Modern political history can be written from the voters’ perspective.

An interview sample can be used to describe one single attribute, e.g. an attitude question. Attitudinal trends are the temporal representation of this simple “poll-like” mode of analysis. The abundance of information collected in a survey would, however, be severely misused if the analysis did not go further. Since the data comprise a wide range of social background characteristics, attitudinal questions, measures of political involvement and behavior, etc, change can be studied in a large number of *subgroups*. The “series of surveys” approach to measure change has its own analytical problems (cf. Hyman 1972).

There are two “ideal types” of dynamic analysis: panel studies and time series. In a panel the same individuals are interviewed twice or more. A time series describes the temporal development of the characteristic of an aggregate (e.g. an economy or an electorate).

Neither the panel nor the time series label is appropriate to the “series of surveys” approach. The basic unit of analysis is, of course, the individual, but analytically the properties of groups (i.e. several aggregates) are studied in a dynamic perspective. The analyst is not, as in the time series approach, bound to study a specific aggregate but can choose from different ways of delineating groups, as well as measuring the interrelation between different groupings.¹

The “series of surveys” technique and ecological analysis have very much in common. In both cases the properties of aggregates are known, but the exact relationship cannot be assessed.

“Series of surveys” analysis

		Aggregate <i>j</i> (e.g. workers)		
		time 2		
		Party P	Party Q	
time 1	Party P	?	?	40
	Party Q	?	?	60
		50	50	100

Ecological analysis

		Aggregate <i>j</i> (e.g. a constituency)		
		Workers	Nonworkers	
	Party P	?	?	40
	Party Q	?	?	60
		50	50	100

¹ When analyzing short-term change in, for example, an election campaign a survey can be broken down according to date of interview and be analyzed week by week. The survey can then be regarded as a series of “mini-surveys.”

Just as it is impossible to recover the unknown cells in the table for a particular constituency with ecological data (cf. Stokes 1969), we can never know the precise nature of the transition matrix within population groups without panel data. But different models of change can be formulated, their consequences for the behavior of aggregates derived, and their empirical plausibility assessed with series of surveys.

One key to unlock hidden processes of change in survey data is the strategy of inventive breakdowns. Important "aggregation criteria" are, of course, basic socio-economic variables like social class and fundamental orientations towards the political system such as party identification, as was exemplified by our empirical research cited above. By imaginative combinations of a wide range of other stratification variables one can reveal politically significant transitions in the electorate. The survey analyst is in this sense very much in the same situation as an archeologist. Layer by layer, tracing the remnants of yesterday, the researcher may detect and explain patterns of change. The parallel between political science and history is, however, not only metaphorical. Methodologically the two disciplines share a good deal in common. The historian's critical treatment of his sources corresponds, for example, to the problems of validity and reliability in survey research.

2. Measures of duration

Dynamic analysis is possible even if only one single survey is available. Usually there are some measures of *duration*, i.e. how long each respondent has been a member of a certain group or exposed to certain environmental factors. Age is, of course, the variable that first comes to mind. But as was demonstrated in the analysis of electoral participation in the student union election, another measure of duration (number of semesters spent at the university) also had a strong impact on voting and in fact counteracted the effects of age.

Behind most analyses using duration as an independent variable

some kind of socialization model can be found. Environmental factors are supposed to influence attitudes, behavior, stability, etc. The longer the duration of these environmental factors, the stronger is the impact on the dependent variable. To cite only one elaboration and test of such a model suffice it to mention Converse's elegant combination of dynamic and comparative analysis on partisan stability (1969).

When a measure of duration is followed through a series of surveys, our two analytical approaches are combined. Special methodological problems then become crucial. Known as "cohort analysis" the basic question is how to separate generational (historically determined) effects from life-cycle (socialization) effects. In this analytical separation of effects one also has to cope with period effects at the time of the interview. (For a survey of cohort analysis, see Riley *et al.* 1972.) Even if cohort analysis only has dealt with the age variable, this fundamental methodological problem becomes pertinent whenever the "series of surveys" and the "measure of duration" approaches are combined.

3. *Subjective change*

Self-rated change was used as a technique to measure altered value preference in the article on student demonstrations (II). Inferring real change in attitudes from this self-rated evaluation is of course associated with severe validity problems, as are recall questions. If, however, the validity proves to be reasonably high, the self-rated change approach could be a short cut to pseudo-dynamic analysis based on a single survey.

The self-rated change approach can be used not only as a substitute for panel studies. Just as subjective class identification has proved to be a valuable complement to status criteria based on objective occupational variables, etc, subjective and real change ought to be possible to separate analytically. The purpose is to give a clearer picture of the processes by which change takes place. To elaborate the generational effects on political attitudes and behavior, the

saliency of age could, for example, be measured by some kind of “subjective age identification.”

Panel Analysis

From what has been said so far the reader may have got the impression that panel studies would solve the analytical problems discussed. Certainly panel analysis is a powerful technique of tracing patterns of change. Some transition models can only be tested on panel data (cf. survey and references in III, p 247 f). But panel studies have certain limitations. The period of time studied could, for example, not be extended more than sample mortality permits. Nor can a perfectly representative panel sample be analyzed without caution. What superficially seems to be a change in attitudes and behavior could prove to be statistical artefacts. In fact, the problems of measuring change in panel data in some instances resemble those in the three “nonpanel” approaches discussed above. One problem could be given the simple formulation: what should change be compared with, or what is the relevant percentage base when computing a measure of change?

The article on panel analysis (III) focuses on the robustness of turnover measures for panel data. The analysis is concentrated on the dichotomous case: two observations and two response classes. Using a latent structural approach, two true latent classes are analytically separated from two manifest response categories. Under the assumption of no true change in the latent classes, it is shown how the observed pattern of change is a function of a) the unreliability, and b) the variance of the measured attribute. Illustrative examples demonstrate under which combinations of conditions some measures of turnover differ most drastically from their true values. Some of these measures have often been used too uncritically in

empirical panel analysis. It is shown how false conclusions about the true pattern of change can easily be made if the analyst neglects the impact of variance and unreliability.

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